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INVENTING OUR FUTURE

AN ACTION PLAN FOR CANADA'S PROSPERITY

A SUMMARY



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ON PROSPERITY DE LA PROSPÉRITÉ

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A SUMMARY

...Canadians must recapture the pioneering spirit that built our nation and apply it to the challenges that confront us: not merely to survive in the new global economy but to thrive in it; not to turn from the competition but to engage it; not to fear the future but to invent it....

FROM THE STEERING GROUP ON PROSPERITY

This booklet summarizes *Inventing our Future: An Action Plan for Canada's Prosperity*. The action plan is a road map for change. It is important to the future of Canada, and your place in that future. The volunteers who prepared it hope that, after reading this summary, you will take the time to read the action plan carefully.

To develop the action plan, the Steering Group relied on the recommendations and advice provided by thousands of Canadians through the Prosperity Initiative consultations. The consultations were extensive. Community talks were held in 186 cities, towns and villages, followed by regional talks in five major centres. There were also roundtables, conferences and forums on subjects such as education and training; science and technology; government; quality; investment; and trade. In addition, consultations were organized with Canada's major economic and industrial sectors; there was a two-day conference with Aboriginal peoples; and discussions took place with key national and regional organizations — including social action groups and other voluntary organizations — as well as with the provincial governments.

The recommendations in the action plan reflect the views expressed by Canadians from all walks of life. There was broad agreement about the challenges that confront us and about what we have to do, as a people and as a country, to ensure our social and economic well-being in a rapidly changing world. The plan is designed to point our country in the right direction and provide the impetus for change.

The Steering Group asks that you read the full action plan and identify the things you can do — at home, school or work, in your family, or through your business or association. Discuss them with friends, fellow workers and elected representatives. Wherever you can support this plan with personal action, please take that action.

WHY AN ACTION PLAN FOR PROSPERITY?

Twelve months ago, the Government of Canada launched the Prosperity Initiative and began extensive consultations with Canadians on how to ensure the prosperity of our country. The government also asked 20 Canadians, all volunteers and from a wide range of backgrounds, to serve as an independent Steering Group on Prosperity.

The Steering Group's task: listen to what Canadians were saying and, operating at arm's length from the government, produce a plan of action for Canada's prosperity, a plan that all Canadians could support and help carry out.

Canada is one of the most prosperous nations and is envied around the world. According to the United Nations, there is no better place to live. So why this action plan and the urgency for it? Because Canada's continued prosperity is being threatened by a global economy where change is accelerating and competition is growing ever fiercer. In fact, compared with other industrial countries, we are already slipping.

The warning signs are everywhere:

- our exports are losing market share;
- we are not attracting enough investment;
- we are not applying new technologies or making innovative products as well as our competitors; and
- workers are not receiving the training they need, and our expensive education systems are not delivering the results they should.

Today, more than a million and a half Canadians are unemployed and many more are underemployed: prosperity is passing them by. Many Canadians have never had a share of prosperity and continue to lack opportunities to achieve it.

Once we looked mainly to our governments for solutions to these problems. However, Canadians are now realizing that governments alone cannot ensure our prosperity; they can only help create the right conditions for it. All of us must collaborate to secure the country's future — workers, educators, scientists, business people, parents, politicians, students, community volunteers, consumers, the economically disadvantaged, and individual men and women.

A Vision of Prosperity

All across the country Canadians spoke of their worries, their hopes and their dreams. There was remarkable agreement — not only on the challenges that confront us but also on a vision of a prosperous Canada.

It is a vision of a country in which all can enjoy a higher standard of living and no Canadian is denied an opportunity to achieve it. It is a vision based on pride in Canada and its magnificent natural heritage, achievements and potential. It is a vision rooted in commitment to community, in which prosperity includes fairness, equity, social responsibility for others, and respect for all Canadians and the diversity of their backgrounds.

Canadians also share a goal of self-reliance, a respect for learning and the full development of each individual. They want Canada to be a champion of achievement and excellence, a producer of quality goods and services sold around the world, a country where economic and social goals reinforce each other, a nation that contributes to human betterment everywhere.

The action plan outlines what Canadians must do to make this vision a reality.

A STRATEGY FOR PROSPERITY

The strategy that shapes the action plan is based on two simple premises. The first is that innovation will create opportunities for all Canadians. The second is that we must build new partnerships that reach across traditional boundaries if we are to become a truly innovative society.

Innovation is the thread that links all the recommendations. Innovation is the introduction of new things or new ways of doing things. It means being open to change — a readiness to initiate, absorb or adapt to new and better ways of thinking, behaving and working together. Innovation can create opportunities in the workplace, in the classroom, in the home — in every aspect of Canadian life.

To evolve new ways of doing things and ease the transition to change, a new spirit of cooperation and collaboration is needed — between management and labour, between parents and educators, between business and governments, and between and among governments.

The action plan is a strategy in three parts. The first deals with building a strong competitive economy based on innovation. The second part looks at innovative ways of improving our education and training systems and building a strong learning culture with a lifetime of learning opportunities for everyone. The third part outlines ways to make Canada a truly inclusive society, one in which all Canadians can realize their full potential.

The plan indicates who should take responsibility for specific actions, and provides target dates for these actions. To ensure that the actions and the strategy are carried out, and to help build the partnerships necessary to secure Canada's future economic and social well-being, the plan concludes by proposing the creation of a Prosperity Council.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY: BUILDING AN INNOVATIVE SOCIETY

The Steering Group on Prosperity believes that the keys to creating opportunity are innovation and quality management practices in both the private and public sectors, combined with technological mastery and growing productivity. To remain prosperous in today's global marketplace, we must become a more innovative society, building on a fully trained work force to keep finding ever better ways of satisfying market needs.

Some Key Recommendations

To stimulate a coordinated approach to quality in all sectors:

- a National Quality Institute to help Canadian companies and public sector organizations become world leaders in quality; and
- consumer education courses in schools and adult education centres to improve consumer knowledge and encourage closer cooperation between business and consumer groups.

To reduce the burden of government on Canadians:

- an independent review of federal and provincial tax and spending performance;
- a competitiveness impact assessment for all current and proposed laws and regulations;
- a regulatory budget to analyze and report on the economic impact and overall burden of regulations; and
- a review of the number of government departments, agencies and programs, with tough performance deadlines for reductions.



To encourage greater use of existing technology and the development of new technologies:

- a broad-band electronic "information highway" of high-speed data links; and
- a faster write-off for investments in innovative equipment and technologies.

To develop a more entrepreneurial economy in which the mix of rewards and incentives encourages the creation of new businesses and the growth of small companies into larger ones:

- broaden available financing tools and unlock the innovative capacity of our financing institutions, including those serving local communities; and
- create a more dynamic stock market for small businesses.

To capture a larger share of global trade, investment and technology:

- a coordinated private sector strategy aimed at doubling the number of firms that export.

To achieve our environmental goals and gain a competitive edge in meeting the worldwide demand for "green" products:

- a Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development.

To promote labour-management cooperation and prepare all members of the work force to take on new and higher-skill jobs:

- a comprehensive, nation-wide approach to worker adjustment including a collaborative labour-management approach to retraining, harmonized qualification standards across the country, adequate financial support, and the direction of public adjustment funds to individuals rather than industries.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY: BUILDING A LEARNING CULTURE

There is broad agreement among Canadians that improving the quality and relevance of education and training is the most important priority if we are to prosper. To create a stronger learning culture in Canada, we must turn these systems around so that they focus on results and ensure that those who pass through the systems actually learn — that is, succeed in mastering new knowledge and skills and acquiring new attitudes. In addition, more flexible, accessible systems are called for, so every Canadian has a lifetime of learning opportunities, and a reason to make a personal commitment to learning. To accomplish these goals, we need to bring together providers and users of education from across the country and give them a new forum for promoting and facilitating change.

Some Key Recommendations

To focus education and training systems on results:

- a Canadian Forum on Learning to define goals, and promote innovation and partnerships for excellence in learning; and
- competence-based systems for all levels of education and training where success is defined by knowledge and skills acquired.

To create continuity in our learning systems and ensure that all Canadians have access to a lifetime of learning opportunities:

- initiatives to give children a good start in school;
- a concerted effort to build stronger links between schools and the world of work;
- community initiatives to ensure all young people complete secondary school; and

- employer-led training equal to 2 percent of working time.

To expand the use of information technologies in learning:

- increase the number of computers in schools by 30 percent annually;
- train teachers to use computers and other technical aids so they are prepared to use them in their teaching; and
- encourage the greater use of computer-based approaches in skills upgrading, literacy and numeracy programs.

To build individual commitment to learning throughout life:

- a Canada-wide communications campaign to make Canadians more aware of the value of learning, the need to learn, and the different learning options available.

CREATING OPPORTUNITY: BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

In this land of opportunity, many Canadians have been and continue to be blocked from achieving their full potential because of gender, race or economic circumstance. We must build a more representative work force, and make the workplace more responsive to new social realities. We also must reshape our approach to support programs while strengthening local community development programs.

Some Key Recommendations

To ensure that all Canadians have access to the opportunities created by the action plan:

- an integrated approach to income security that enhances the ability of Canadians to find work, while reducing disincentives to work;
- a restructuring of the workplace to accommodate family and other social pressures; and
- a new set of training programs for Aboriginal managers at institutions of higher learning.

Many of the recommendations in this action plan have been proposed before but never implemented; others have been adopted here and there but with no concerted impact across the country. For these reasons, the Steering Group believes that Canada, like other countries responding to similar challenges, must have a Prosperity Council. This would not be a federal-government institution but a national organization with a limited lifespan that would help build partnerships throughout our society and bring about prompt and effective action. The Council's members would represent business, labour, education, consumers, and voluntary and social policy groups.

Taken together, these recommendations, along with the others outlined in the full action plan, provide a road map for change. It is up to all Canadians to build on our existing strengths, and work together to find the best ways to achieve our collective vision of a prosperous Canada.

To order copies of this summary, or the full action plan, *Inventing Our Future: An Action Plan for Canada's Prosperity*, contact:

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